

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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For me, what has happened over the past week in the Middle East and North Africa has presented me with a very profound personal and professional challenge. This was not an easy speech for me to write. Over the past few days, I have experienced the full range of emotions from shock to anger to deep sadness as I watched four of our diplomats brutally murdered in Benghazi and saw our diplomatic missions in Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia violated – watching and praying that my friends and colleagues there were okay. I even watched my children’s former school looted and destroyed. My oldest daughter graduated from high school there and the remainder of my children spent two of their best years there.

Despite this, I have also seen many things that have given me hope. I want to thank all of you in this course for your support, especially the Libyan officers, who have expressed their sympathy and apologized for the death of Ambassador Chris Stevens and his colleagues. I never met Ambassador Stevens, but by all accounts, he was a man absolutely dedicated to helping others, especially the Libyan people over the past 18 months. I also want to thank the Libyan Prime Minister and the Libyan people for their strong words of support. Your Prime Minister has really demonstrated the leadership needed to make Libya a strong successful democratic country.

I would also like to thank the security forces of Libya, Sudan, Egypt and, of course, Jordan for their brave security forces that have risked their own safety to protect the diplomats of my country from the inexcusable acts of the extremists who resort to violence to express their discontent.

The person who created the film, “Innocence of Muslims,” clearly had one purpose, and that was to show Americans and the West that Islam is a religion of violence and irrational fanatics and show Muslims that Christians and Jews have no respect for their religion. In effect he wanted to create a religious war. The reaction in Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Lebanon and Tunis helped him accomplish his objectives and the images of the violent invasion of our embassies in Tunis, Cairo, Sanaa, and Benghazi, the burning of the American School in Tunis, and especially, the image of the bodies of Ambassador Stevens and his 3 colleagues returning to the United States will be what most Americans remember.

Unfortunately, what they won’t remember or see is the outpouring of sympathy from the Libyan people, the sympathy or tears of frustration of the majority of Tunisians who want their country to be a stable modern democracy, the people of Jordan, Pakistan, Indonesia, and others, who protested without resorting to violence, and they won’t see the friendship we enjoy here in this school between people of all faiths.

That is, they won’t see it unless we, as the future leaders of our respective countries, work to rebuild the damaged relations. I believe my job as a Foreign Area Officer for the U.S. Army is to carry back the message to Americans that most Muslims are good, intelligent, family-loving people who are nothing like the criminal mobs who attacked our diplomatic missions. Hopefully, in the process of my work here, I will also be able to show that most Americans also are good, intelligent, family-loving people who live

in a country built by immigrants from all different countries and faiths, where respect for other religions is an ingrained value.

We will not agree on everything. The United States was founded on the fundamental value of respect for the thoughts and religions of others. Like President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and millions of other Americans, I completely condemn the hate-filled message of the amateurish film that has caused all the problems and I understand what an insult it is to Muslims everywhere. However, I also believe with all my heart that this in no way justifies the reaction that we have seen over the past several days.

This film has sparked a lot of discussion on Freedom of Speech and where the line between Freedom of Speech and respect for others should be. The United States was the first country to successfully rebel against tyranny and I have watched in awe in Tunisia, and later in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, as the people sacrificed their lives to end their own tyranny. However, our founding fathers realized that without a constitution and laws that enshrined individual rights, it would be inevitable that tyranny would return. Limits on speech also limit thought – preventing a country from reaching its true potential to invent, create, and flourish. Therefore, the first amendment to our constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly. These freedoms are not separate from one another, but are an integral part of one another. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States. Why? Because Muslims can say what they want, pray as they want, and gather whenever and wherever they want in ways they cannot in many Muslim countries. In the Arab World, you will have to decide where your own line lies between freedom of speech and respect for others, but I would caution you, that the farther you draw that line, the more people you leave on the other side and the more ideas and creativity you suppress. Because when you start limiting speech, you are by definition, putting one group's beliefs over another's.

In addition, what we have found in our country is that people who engage in hate-filled speech, such as exists in "Innocence of Muslims" end up making themselves look far more foolish than the group they are criticizing. After Ambassador Stevens was killed, I watched the 14 minute trailer of the movie, so I could see what could possibly have caused such anger. It was deeply offensive to Muslims and the Prophet Mohammed (صلى الله عليه وسلم) (Peace be Upon Him), but it was also so foolish and amateurish that I think that anyone who saw it would believe that the producer was a fool who had no idea about Islam or much else for that matter. In reality, if it wasn't for the reaction in the Middle East, I don't think even 1% of Americans would have seen it. Now, I imagine, everyone with a computer has seen it.

So now what?

You may have noticed that when I started my brief, I began with *بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم* (In the name of God, the most compassionate, the most merciful). I am not a Muslim, but I used that term deliberately, because I believe we need to focus on what we have in common instead of the differences that the extremists among the Christians, Jews and Muslims choose to focus on as they try and spread hatred among us. I also said the phrase, because I believe God is compassionate, is merciful, is forgiving, and wants peace between his people. His Majesty King Abdullah II said in 2004 when delivering the Amman Message, "Islam forbids wanton aggression and terrorism, enjoins freedom of religion, peace, justice and good-will to non-Muslims, it is also a message of good news, friendship and hope to the whole world." I believe he is absolutely correct and that storming Embassies will not end criticism of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), nor will making laws to stop criticism of Islam. The only way to limit criticism is through education and dialogue. As leaders of our countries, we have a responsibility to help achieve this peace. Again, I thank all of you for your kindness and support.